

# Listen, Read, Write, Tell: Storytelling in P-12 Education

## Stories @ Work

Jonesborough Repertoire Theatre  
Jonesborough, TN  
Saturday, Oct. 8, 2005, 11:30 am -12:30 pm

### **SUMMARY OF TODAY'S PANEL PRESENTATION: YES! (Youth, Educators, and Storytellers) SIG**

Our media-oriented world provides constant visual images. Test scores and learning standards are stressed. This panel explores how storytelling helps students use their own imaginations as they develop basic skills across curricular areas. New research on the impact of storytelling will be shared. There will be opportunity for audience questions. Discussion will include the use of storytelling by the teacher, as well as storytelling by students.

### **STORYTELLING FOR THE YOUNGEST LISTENERS Mary Jo Huff-- Storyteller, Author, Educator**

It is important to tell stories for the young pre-school children so they have a good listening foundation. Storytelling is a cornerstone for developing listening skills, comprehension, predicting, analyzing and learning to retell stories.

Today's world, filled with standards for reading, writing, math and science, has placed an even stronger emphasis on the power of storytelling. Children first experience the rhythm of words with the nursery rhymes and quickly move into fairy tales and fables.

The storyteller has the advantage of watching children as they use their imagination when listening to a story. Even the youngest can take an art medium and create their vision of the story characters, the setting and embellish the illustration from their own imagination.

Challenges with the young pre-school children can be met by using puppets, props and visual aids. The brain research establishes the priority for the development of oral language for all children and what better way to be exposed then through storytelling.

Mary Jo Huff, Storyteller, Educator, Author  
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**KIDS AS TELLERS:  
ESTABLISHING A CLIMATE FOR STORYTELLING IN A K-5 SCHOOL  
Darlene Neumann, Educator and Storyteller**

Storytelling is fun, but the process of choosing and studying the structure of a story, learning and telling it, supports reading and writing skills. Communication, imagination and visualization are strengthened. We are continually exposed to, actually bombarded with, visual images. Because storytelling involves no visual cues except gestures and body language of the storyteller, listening becomes both an art and a skill.

Examples of Storytelling at Sherwood School, a K-5 school in Highland Park, Illinois:

- Sherwood will soon be celebrating our Tenth Annual Storytelling Festival where each fourth and fifth grader tells a story. Younger children (grades 2-3) who are in a Storytelling Club may tell if they choose. A professional teller presents concerts and workshops. Children choose their own stories by listening and reading! After a story is chosen, children make storymaps with captions that include vocabulary they want to include, and they practice telling. Experienced tellers may tell a story that they have written. Multiple copies of books with ready-to-tell stories are available in the library.
- Children hear storytelling in the IMC on a regular basis. Children begin formally listening to stories in Kindergarten. Stories told from K-5 are told both for enjoyment or to enhance curriculum. A storytelling cycle has been established for some areas of Folklore. For example, in Kindergarten, the Perrault version of the Cinderella story is told. As part of a Chinese New Year Unit, first graders hear Yeh-Shen, the Chinese Cinderella. Second grade has a fairy tale unit, so a variety of Cinderella stories are heard and read. Students fill in charts, locating elements of setting, magic or magic characters, a shoe, what the main character wanted to do. Children write their own story, inspired by a suitcase full of shoes, telling the story based on elements from the chart. Because they also study Native Americans, picture book versions of Cinderella stories such as The Rough-Faced Girl and Sootface are read to second graders.
- Storytelling is integrated into units of study, but storytelling has also entered into the areas of writing and research. During the study of astronomy and mythology, fifth graders listened to many myths. They wrote their own myths, performing them in a sky dome borrowed from a local community college. In the darkness of the dome, under the stars, students pointed out their chosen constellation and told their myth about those stars.
- Research-based storytelling has also become a viable option for presenting information gathered during research. Students have found their storytelling voice when doing research and realizing that they can share their information through story. A research-based integration of storytelling into the curriculum happened as third graders researched pioneers. Children made sense of all the facts they discovered by telling stories, putting facts into a form that was easily understood and remembered not only by the teller but also by their audience.
- If you are not a storyteller, buy CDs, and share the joy of storytelling with your students! Hire storytellers! Sherwood students enjoy listening to professional tellers, both live and on CD. Give them ample opportunity to listen! Storytellers need a good listening audience.

Our society values working together and sharing ideas. We need to have children practice and master these vital skills, and storytelling is an excellent, exciting, and achievable means to accomplish these goals, not only in their academic lives, but also for their future experiences.

Darlene Neumann, Library Media Specialist and Storyteller, Panel Chair, and Co-Chair of YES!

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**IN THEIR OWN WORDS. . .**  
**Students from Sherwood Elementary School in Highland Park, Illinois,**  
**Share Their Thoughts about Storytelling**

“Storytelling is REALLY FUN!!!!!!!!!!!! Kids don't have a lot of chances to do things that adults get to do like being in front of an audience.” **Grace and Rosa, age 8 ½**

“Storytelling is important to me because it makes me feel confident. It also is something that my cousin and I like to do together. So sometimes we help each other practice and edit. When I am bored, sometimes I try to think of a story.”

**Becca, age 9** (Written in bed, by flashlight, with a broken wrist)

“This was my first year storytelling. Retelling a story in storytelling form is like being read a story. Your voice changes for each character and it also goes up or down depending on what you are saying. When I got up to the stage, I had huge butterflies! If you are storytelling for the first time, don't panic. Just keep your cool, and pretend no one is there. Storytelling is fun and you should try it sometime.” **Ben, age 10**

"I like being a storyteller at Sherwood because it helps me talk in front of a group without being nervous. It helps if I have a report to give in front of the class or when I am in a school play. It's also fun to tell tandem stories with my friends." **Paul, age 10**

“I think kids should be taught not only how to read or how to play sports but how to storytell. Storytelling isn't just repeating something you heard from someone else but learning it in your own special way. Many children are afraid in front of audiences, but a little while back the #1 fear of Americans was getting up in front of others and speaking. It shows that building up confidence in yourself really can pay off when you are older. That is why kids should learn how to storytell at young ages. You have to get the idea of it and then put many of your own touches into it. You just have to be confident in YOURSELF!” **Carley, Age 11**

“The impact that storytelling has had on me is amazing. I've been telling stories since second grade. When I started it was a little difficult to speak in front of all those strangers, but it got easier once I began to work on it more. It got to be so much fun! I was able to teach my cousin and some of her friends to story tell and they are all still doing it. Storytelling also gives me confidence and helps me feel more comfortable giving reports in school. All in all storytelling is a wonderful thing that I hope more kids and adults get into. It has been a great experience!”

**Leah, age 11**

Students from Sherwood School in Highland Park, Illinois.

Learn more about the Storytelling Festival at

[http://www.nssd112.org/sherwood/IMC/imcstoryfest\\_start.htm](http://www.nssd112.org/sherwood/IMC/imcstoryfest_start.htm)

## **STORYTELLING IN MIDDLE SCHOOL? YOU BET!**

**Elizabeth Rose, Storyteller/Educator**

In my 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading and American History classes, I don't have to try very hard to incorporate storytelling into my curriculum. It just fits naturally, and is fun to boot!

Some of the very basic Curriculum Standards in middle grades that can be met through the use of storytelling are:

6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> grade: Continue to develop oral language and listening skills.

- Model active listening in both formal and informal settings.
- Know and use rules for conversations.
- Continue to formulate and respond to questions from teachers and classmates.
- Organize and share information, stories, experiences, ideas, and feelings with others in both formal and informal situations.
- Participate in creative responses to text (e.g., debates, dramatizations, speeches).
- Deliver an oral presentation or recitation that conveys a clear point, using information from any content area and utilizing visual aids for contextual support.
- Introduce the importance of using correct stress, pitch, and juncture in oral reading and presenting.
- Continue to interpret and use a variety of non-verbal communication techniques to enhance meaning (e.g., posture, gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact), and how they impact the audience and speaker.

Storytelling can effectively help to enhance listening and speaking skills, and increase vocabulary. It also allows for oral expression and imagery, and helps in the understanding of story elements. Some strategies to use in the classroom include:

- Model “how” to read aloud with expression.
- Tell stories and have children listen for details; write a summary or a response to the story.
- Tell a story and have the children draw a picture of a visual that they had from the story.
- Orally practice dialogue from a selected text.
- Before reading, take time to build background knowledge so that children can talk about their experiences and make connections.
- Have children read aloud and then verbalize a summary of what they just read.
- Model “think alouds” so that children can see the reading process come alive through metacognition.
- Give children more time to practice storytelling activities in class. Be more spontaneous!
- Rewrite fables, folktales, and fairy tales from different points-of-view then tell them.
- Let the students become “experts” on assigned subjects in history and let them teach the class.
- Collect oral histories.
- Create skits from short stories and perform.

Ideas are limitless on how to use storytelling activities in the classroom that correlate to curriculum standards, especially in reading and American history. Just be creative and have fun. If you are having fun, chances are your students will be having fun too!

Elizabeth Rose, Storyteller/Educator

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## LITERACY AND THE ORAL TRADITION

### Jim Cogan, Storyteller

The main point Jim brings to this esteemed gathering is that oral storytelling carries to adolescent listeners (grades 9-12) the genetics, motivators, memory links, and interdisciplinary themes that form the basis of all learning: academic, social, cultural, workplace, individual survival.

Storytelling in high school curricula helps students meet and exceed the standards that are used as a basis to test their achievement because storytelling training and experience . . .

- begs the demonstration of a broad, vivid, visual vocabulary as well as versatility in the use of sound, pace, volume, pitch and emotional tone.
- calls for the comprehension, development, and application of fundamental and advanced literary skills for use across the curricula: language arts, history, fine arts, science, tech.
- creates opportunities for communicating in a specialized language such as the drama of scientific inquiry or the essence of mathematical solutions for real life problems.
- requires both the identification of historical and cultural contexts of the human experience but also increases understanding of how language has been and can be used to influence individual, group, and societal behavior...even change the world.
- encourages decision-making in all curricula. These decision-making skills are developed in every storyteller to effectively convey meaningful stories.
- helps students connect this skill/knowledge to possible careers. Storytelling may be the world's most versatile and applicable discipline. It breeds awareness of the importance of choice, organization, time management, individual responsibility, deadlines, aesthetic selectivity, self-critique, problem solving, using limited resources...vital needs for success.

In the passage from ages 13 to 18, young men and women are finding out who they are and what their connection is to the world around them. The live, give-and-take of the storytelling experience is a vital catalyst to the sense of discovery that most state standards are, in their own ways, may be trying to measure.

Storytelling is, indeed, "Listen, Read, Write, Tell," and so much more. Regardless of the discipline area, these skills are basic to comprehending, analyzing, selecting, synthesizing, and creating an individual identity in a world bombarded by images. Above all they create a seedbed for imaginative thinking; a playground for mental, physical, communicative, and experimental journeys that, for centuries, has helped mankind make sense of this wondrous experience called life.

Jim Cogan, Storyteller

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## **THE NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN STORYTELLING**

**Jane Stenson, Storyteller and Educator**

There is a definite need for educational research in storytelling. Teachers and storytellers-in-residence can add research components to their classrooms/residencies. This work can develop a body of knowledge that the educational community and the storytelling community can use to broaden the ways storytelling is approached in schools.

The Baker Demonstration School accomplished three types of studies from 2003 to 2005. The school was a research site for the ETSU-NASA study on children's attitudes toward science. I did a two-year teacher-action research project in my Kindergarten classroom on the children's use of science curriculum in their story writing. The school conducted a small literacy research study in Second and Third Grade classrooms to assess the effect of storytelling on children's vocabulary, writing, and ability to tell stories; Peter Fisher was the research director. Significance was achieved in vocabulary and nearly achieved in writing.

Jane Stenson, Educator and Storyteller

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## **NCTE (NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH) GUIDELINE**

### **Teaching Storytelling: A Position Statement from the Committee on Storytelling**

Once upon a time, oral storytelling ruled. It was the medium through which people learned their history, settled their arguments, and came to make sense of the phenomena of their world. Then along came the written word with its mysterious symbols. For a while, only the rich and privileged had access to its wonders. But in time, books, signs, pamphlets, memos, cereal boxes, constitutions—countless kinds of writing appeared everywhere people turned. The ability to read and write now ruled many lands. Oral storytelling, like the simpleminded youngest brother in the olden tales, was foolishly cast aside. Oh, in casual ways people continued to tell each other stories at bedtime, across dinner tables, and around campfires, but the respect for storytelling as a tool of learning was almost forgotten.

Luckily, a few wise librarians, camp counselors, folklorists, and traditional tellers from cultures which still highly valued the oral tale kept storytelling alive. Schoolchildren at the feet of a storyteller sat mesmerized and remembered the stories till the teller came again. Teachers discovered that children could easily recall whatever historical or scientific facts they learned through story. Children realized they made pictures in their minds as they heard stories told, and they kept making pictures even as they read silently to themselves. Just hearing stories made children want to tell and write their own tales. Parents who

wanted their children to have a sense of history found eager ears for the kind of story that begins, "When I was little ...." Stories, told simply from mouth to ear, once again traveled the land.

### **What Is Storytelling?**

Storytelling is relating a tale to one or more listeners through voice and gesture. It is not the same as reading a story aloud or reciting a piece from memory or acting out a drama—though it shares common characteristics with these arts. The storyteller looks into the eyes of the audience and together they compose the tale. The storyteller begins to see and re-create, through voice and gesture, a series of mental images; the audience, from the first moment of listening, squints, stares, smiles, leans forward or falls asleep, letting the teller know whether to slow down, speed up, elaborate, or just finish. Each listener, as well as each teller, actually composes a unique set of story images derived from meanings associated with words, gestures, and sounds. The experience can be profound, exercising the thinking and touching the emotions of both teller and listener.

### **Why Include Storytelling in School?**

Everyone who can speak can tell stories. We tell them informally as we relate the mishaps and wonders of our day-to-day lives. We gesture, exaggerate our voices, pause for effect. Listeners lean in and compose the scene of our tale in their minds. Often they are likely to be reminded of a similar tale from their own lives. These naturally learned oral skills can be used and built on in our classrooms in many ways.

Students who search their memories for details about an event as they are telling it orally will later find those details easier to capture in writing. Writing theorists value the rehearsal, or prewriting, stage of composing. Sitting in a circle and swapping personal or fictional tales is one of the best ways to help writers rehearse.

Listeners encounter both familiar and new language patterns through story. They learn new words or new contexts for already familiar words. Those who regularly hear stories subconsciously acquire familiarity with narrative patterns and begin to predict upcoming events. Both beginning and experienced readers call on their understanding of patterns as they tackle unfamiliar texts. Then they re-create those patterns in both oral and written compositions. Learners who regularly tell stories become aware of how an audience affects a telling, and they carry that awareness into their writing.

Both tellers and listeners find a reflection of themselves in stories. Through the language of symbol, children and adults can act out through a story the fears and understandings not so easily expressed in everyday talk. Story characters represent the best and worst in humans. By exploring story territory orally, we explore ourselves—whether it be through ancient myths and folktales, literary short stories, modern picture books, or poems. Teachers who value a personal understanding of their students can learn much by noting what story a child chooses to tell and how that story is uniquely composed in the telling. Through this same process, teachers can learn a great deal about themselves.

Story is the best vehicle for passing on factual information. Historical figures and events linger in children's minds when communicated by way of a narrative. The ways of other cultures, both ancient and living, acquire honor in story. The facts about how plants and animals develop, how numbers work, or how government policy influences history—any topic, for that matter—can be incorporated into story form and made more memorable if the listener takes the story to heart.

Children at any level of schooling who do not feel as competent as their peers in reading or writing are often masterful at storytelling. The comfort zone of the oral tale can be the path by which they reach the

written one. Tellers who become very familiar with even one tale by retelling it often, learn that literature carries new meaning with each new encounter. Students working in pairs or in small storytelling groups learn to negotiate the meaning of a tale.

### **How Do You Include Storytelling in School?**

Teachers who tell personal stories about their past or present lives model for students the way to recall sensory detail. Listeners can relate the most vivid images from the stories they have heard or tell back a memory the story evokes in them. They can be instructed to observe the natural storytelling taking place around them each day, noting how people use gesture and facial expression, body language, and variety in tone of voice to get the story across.

Stories can also be rehearsed. Again, the teacher's modeling of a prepared telling can introduce students to the techniques of eye contact, dramatic placement of a character within a scene, use of character voices, and more. If students spend time rehearsing a story, they become comfortable using a variety of techniques. However, it is important to remember that storytelling is communication, from the teller to the audience, not just acting or performing.

Storytellers can draft a story the same way writers draft. Audiotape or videotape recordings can offer the storyteller a chance to be reflective about the process of telling. Listeners can give feedback about where the telling engaged them most. Learning logs kept throughout a storytelling unit allow both teacher and students to write about the thinking that goes into choosing a story, mapping its scenes, coming to know its characters, deciding on detail to include or exclude.

Like writers, student storytellers learn from models. Teachers who tell personal stories or go through the process of learning to tell folk or literary tales make the most credible models. Visiting storytellers or professional tellers on audiotapes or videotapes offer students a variety of styles. Often a community historian or folklorist has a repertoire of local tales. Older students both learn and teach when they take their tales to younger audiences or community agencies. Once you get storytelling going, there is no telling where it will take you.

Oral storytelling is regaining its position of respect in communities where hundreds of people of every age gather together for festivals in celebration of its power. Schools and pre-service college courses are gradually giving it curriculum space as well. It is unsurpassed as a tool for learning about ourselves, about the ever-increasing information available to us, and about the thoughts and feelings of others.

The simpleminded youngest brother in olden tales, while disregarded for a while, won the treasure in the end every time. The NCTE Committee on Storytelling invites you to reach for a treasure—the riches of storytelling.

**NOTE:** This guideline has been approved by the NCTE Executive Committee and found to be consistent with NCTE position on educational issues. This position statement may be printed, copied, and disseminated without permission from NCTE.

<http://www.marilynkinsella.org/NCET%20-%20position%20on%20storytelling.htm>

## **STATE STANDARDS**



While state standards do not specifically mention the word “storytelling,” many standards are supported by storytelling. To see the standards for each state, visit this site, Education World. You will find links to National Standards and State Standards from each state.

<http://www.educationworld.com/standards/>